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Merry Christmas!

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JOURNAL OF THE MISSISSIPPI BAPTIST CONVENTION SINCE 1877

BRIEFS

BILOXIAN'S BOOK GETS TOP AWARD FROM MAG

CAROL STREAM, IL (BP and local reports) — Biloxi native Russell Moore, president of Southern Baptists' Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission in Nashville, has claimed Christianity Today's top book honor for the second time in four years. His book titled, *The Storm-Tossed Family: How the Cross Reshapes the Home*, was chosen by Christianity Today as its 2019 Book of the Year. A previous book he authored, *Onward: Engaging the Culture Without Losing the Gospel*, was Christianity Today's 2016 Book of the Year.

PAKISTAN TAGGED FOR RELIGIOUS VIOLATIONS

WASHINGTON, D.C. (BP) — U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said Dec. 11 that Pakistan has been officially added to the federal agency's list of Countries of Particular Concern (CPC), a recognition reserved under federal law for governments that have committed or tolerated "systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom." The CPC list includes Burma (Myanmar), China, Eritrea, Iran, North Korea, Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan.

NO ISSUE OF THE BAPTIST RECORD DECEMBER 27

JACKSON, Ms. (Special) — Due to postal regulations that limit The Baptist Record to 50 issues per year, the weekly news journal of the Mississippi Baptist Convention does not publish on the weeks that include Independence Day in July and Christmas Day in December. The Record will resume publication with the first issue of the new year, dated Jan. 3. The next issue open for church news submissions will be Jan. 10. All such items must be received by Jan. 3. Thank you for your faithful support of this ministry of information. The staff of The Baptist Record wishes for you and your loved ones a joyous celebration of the birth of our Lord and Savior and a special new year of helping to bring Mississippi and the world to Jesus.

Disaster relief not finished?

By William H. Perkins Jr.
Editor

The work of the Mississippi Baptist Disaster Relief Task Force has been closed out in the East Coast states affected by a cluster of massive hurricanes earlier this year, but the coordinator of disaster relief for Mississippi Baptists believes it soon may be time to look westward.

"People caught up in the historical wildfires in California are probably going to need help — a lot of help," said Shane McGivney, director of men's ministry for the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board (MBCB). "There has not yet been a formal call for assistance, but the devastation in the affected areas is immense."

Disaster-trained chaplains are in the areas now, McGivney said, to offer comfort and counseling to grieving residents whose loved ones are on the list of almost 100 people killed and whose homes and businesses burned to the ground. Preliminary estimates are that 14,000 homes were destroyed and nearly 500 were seriously damaged.

The northern California towns of Paradise and Magalia were mostly wiped out by the Camp Fire that began Nov. 8 and lasted until Nov. 25. In what has been termed a miracle from God, three Southern Baptist churches survived the fires even though other properties situated closely on all four sides of the churches were destroyed.



HEADING HOME — Volunteers from Mississippi Baptist churches across the state wrap up a mobilization to Panama City, Fla., during the Mississippi Baptist Disaster Relief Task Force's response earlier this year to hurricane damage in the area. (BR photo)

"We want to do everything we can to help those churches be places of peace and refuge for all the hurting people out there right now," McGivney said.

Sam Porter, national director for disaster relief with Southern Baptists' North American Mission Board (NAMB) in Alpharetta, Ga., thanked volunteers who con-

tinued to step up even when fatigue set in during a demanding and difficult 2018.

"I cannot say 'thank you' enough to the Southern Baptist Convention, the 47,000 churches that support SBDRL [Southern Baptist Disaster Relief] by providing volunteers and donating

see RELIEF on p. 6

Chitwood: IMB abuse study will continue

RICHMOND, Va. (BP) — The ongoing independent study of the handling of past allegations of abuse and sexual harassment — and present policies and practices in that area of concern — will carry forward under the administration of Paul Chitwood, newly-elected president of the International Mission Board



CHITWOOD

(IMB) of the Southern Baptist Convention in Richmond, Va.

"This is tremendously important work," Chitwood said in a Dec. 12 press release. "Under my leadership, in partnership with our trustee board, IMB remains fully committed to following through on its promise of a thorough, independent examination."

The study, launched under Chitwood's predecessor David Platt, comes amid Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) president J.D. Greear's ongoing Sexual Abuse Advisory Study which is being conducted in partnership with Southern Baptists' Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission in Nashville.

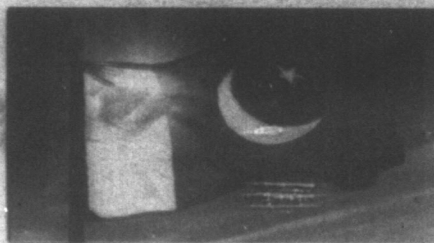
Aid groups booted by Pakistan government

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan (BP and local reports) — Pakistan, a predominantly Muslim country known for persecuting religious minorities, has expelled 18 aid organizations including World Vision and other Christian groups.

The expulsions will affect more than 11 million aid recipients in the country, which suffers from shortcomings in areas such as healthcare and education. The expulsions will also result in an estimated loss of more than \$130 million in annual aid, the Associated Press (AP) reported. The stated economic impact is based on the work of 15 groups represented by the umbrella Pakistan Humanitarian Foundation, spokesman Umair Hasan told AP.

Another 20 groups are at risk of expulsion, AP reported.

World Vision, based in Monrovia, La., "worked with relevant Pakistan government institutions to hand over responsibility for life-saving and poverty-reducing programs," AP quoted World Vision communications executive Cynthia Colin as saying. "We will do what we can to minimize the impact [on children] and will



KICKED OUT — Pakistan has expelled 18 aid organizations including World Vision and other Christian groups. (Photo by Jiri Fogel/Shutterstock.com)

continue to discuss the possibility of restarting work under any new legal framework which the government may subsequently introduce."

Catholic Relief and the Irish Catholic aid group Trocaire are among the 18 groups

see PAKISTAN on p. 7

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From the editor

WILLIAM PERKINS

Remember the martyrs

It is fitting that as we close out another year of Great Commission service around the world, we take time to remember the missionary martyrs.

Life for many Southern Baptist missionaries and their families is often not easy. That's not to say there is no joy for them, because there is indeed great joy in the service of the Lord. They have been called by God and have surrendered to His leading of their own free will, and there is no greater thrill than helping lead people to salvation through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Some of them have paid the ultimate earthly price for obeying God's call on their lives. During this season of international missions emphasis across the Mississippi Baptist Convention and the Southern Baptist Convention, may we make this annual pause, for just a few moments, to remember those servants who were faithful unto death:

■ **March 14, 2018** — Randy and Kathy Arnett. Died from injuries sustained in an automobile accident in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

■ **March 15, 2004** — Larry Elliott, his wife Jean, Karen Watson, and David McDonnell. Murdered in northern Iraq in a drive-by ambush of their automobile. McDonnell's wife Carrie was critically wounded but survived.

■ **March 4, 2003** — Bill Hyde, working in Philippines. Killed by a terrorist bomb planted at Davao City Airport.

■ **December 30, 2002** — Bill Koehn, Martha Myers, and Kathy Gariety, working at Jibla Baptist Hospital in Jibla, Yemen. Murdered at the hospital by a Muslim extremist.

■ **April 21, 1998** — Charles W. Hood Jr., working in Colombia, South America. Shot to death in his front yard by robbers.

■ **March 23, 1995** — Chu Hon and Kei Yi, working in Khabarovsk, Russia. Murdered in their locked apartment.

■ **March 27, 1991** — Lynda Bethea, working in Kenya. Beaten to death by highway robbers near Kijabe. Her husband Larry was also brutally beaten but survived.

■ **October 2, 1990** — Mary Anna Gilbert, working in China.

Killed in crash of hijacked Chinese jetliner near Guangzhou. She was a teacher with Cooperative Services International.

■ **November 26, 1986** — Libby Senter, working in Liberia. Murdered along with her daughter Rachel.

■ **October 11, 1985** — James Philpot, working in Mexico. Shot dead during a confrontation after a minor automobile accident.

■ **June 15, 1978** — Archie G. Dunaway Jr., working in Rhodesia. Killed by guerrillas seeking an African-majority government in the white-ruled, former British colony.

■ **March 21, 1973** — Gladys Hopewell, working in Taiwan. No details of her murder were available.

■ **January 16, 1972** — Mavis Pate, working in the Gaza area of the Middle East. Shot by Arab guerrillas in an ambush as she drove near a refugee camp.

■ **July 7, 1971** — Paul E. and Nancy Potter, working in the Dominican Republic. No details of their murders were available.

■ **February 10, 1951** — William L. Wallace, working in China. Died in a communist prison. Many people familiar with Wallace's case believe the physician was tortured to death.

■ **January 1942** — Rufas F. Gray, working in China. Died in Japanese camp for war prisoners in Baguio, Philippines.

■ **December 1880** — John Westrup, working in Mexico. Murdered by a band of Indians and Mexicans while traveling from Santa Rosa to Monterey.

■ **October 1, 1861** — J. Landrum Holmes, working in China. Murdered while attempting to dissuade invaders from attacking the village of Chur Kia on Shantung Peninsula during the Taiping Rebellion.

Since the first generation of Christians, there has been a constant element of danger in spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and there's still a need for people willing to answer the Great Commission in hostile areas of the world. All they're asking of us is to support them sacrificially through prayer, giving, and going.

Given the task at hand (Matt. 28:18-20), that's not too much to ask.

Reality of God's favor

What do we mean when we talk about the "favor of God?" The house you've always wanted goes into foreclosure and you buy it for a steal? Your kids bring their report cards home with straight A's? You find out a long lost relative left you a tidy sum of money? Many people may think God's favor is something like those blessings. When life seems to break your way, it's easy to think, "God is really smiling down on me now. He must really love me."

When we turn to the New Testament, though, we get a splash of cold water. The favor of God doesn't always line up with great circumstances. Case in point: Mary. When the angel Gabriel shows up to announce the first Christmas to Mary in Luke 1, he tells her twice that she has God's favor but her situation sure doesn't look like it. Gabriel has just told her she is going to be pregnant out of wedlock in a culture where this isn't just frowned upon but could have been punishable by death. The man she loves, Joseph, is probably not going to understand the situation or believe her bizarre explanation and might leave her. She's already poor, and if Joseph rejects her, she'll be destitute. She might have to beg for a living.

So here's Mary — financially insolvent, with a ruined reputation, her most important relationship in tatters. Maybe you can relate if you sense no joy or good cheer this Christmas season, but rather dread. Your life doesn't look like one "blessed and highly favored." For you, Christmas only reminds you of all the good you don't have in your life.

If that's you, then Mary's circumstances are particularly relevant because she supposedly has the favor of God in the midst of all her mess. How? Because a Son is being born to her — a Son, the angel says, whose name will be "Jesus," meaning that He will save His people from their sins.

We don't have to be frantic if we don't get to everything on our bucket list. Many of us live with such an urgency to experience everything that life becomes worthless if we don't. It's not the glib stuff, like not seeing the Grand



Guest opinion

with J.D. Greear

Canyon, that really leads us to disappointment. It's not getting married, or having children, or being financially comfortable, or overcoming an illness. What we need to see is that in the Resurrection, under the reign of the Son of David, every disappointment will be fulfilled.

We have pain. He will reverse it. We have disappointment. He will erase it. We yearn for justice. He will restore it. When we go through seasons of racial strife in our country, many people start to ask, "Will there ever be justice?" Maybe the yearning for justice is more personal: You've been wronged and just can't get past it. You want to cry out like the psalmist, "Will the wicked go unpunished?"

Unless we look to God's perfect justice instead of our judicial system or our own efforts we'll always be bitter. Perfect justice will be restored, but only when Jesus rules from David's throne. That truth gives us the hope to continue working for justice now while enduring the injustice in the world.

In the end, that's what God's favor is all about. It's what Christmas is all about — hope. God's favor isn't always easy. Sometimes, as with Mary, it brings with it a lot of difficulties but it's always good because it brings us a hope in God's promises and an assurance that His presence will be with us.

Greear is president of the Southern Baptist Convention and senior pastor of The Summit Church in Raleigh-Durham, N.C. His commentary appears courtesy of Baptist Press. Edited for style, length, and clarity.

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MAKING PROGRESS — Bible studies are cropping up in the darkest corners of Brazil's big cities, the kind of Gospel impact that members of Highland Church, Shelbyville, Ky., saw for themselves when they visited Brazil for the first time a few years ago and their hearts grabbed hold of the vision. (IMB photo)

Kentucky church discovers Brazil 'piece of the puzzle'

SAO PAULO, Brazil (IMB) — In their home in São Paulo, Brazil, Scott and Joyce Pittman have a giant map of the city plastered across their wall. It's a picture of the work still to be done in this metro area of 22 million people.

Now that image is plastered across the hearts of the members of Highland Church, Shelbyville, Ky., too. Since they partnered with city strategy leaders several years ago at Southern Baptists' International Mission Board in Richmond, Va., they haven't been able to get São Paulo out of their minds.

"When you see that map, you can see the vision Scott and Joyce have for the city. They do a great job of explaining what it will take to reach it," relayed Chris Platt, pastor of Highland Church. "Then, when you go out into the city and meet the people your love for missions just comes alive. You give more, you pray more, and you think more about missions."

Ever since the Kentucky Baptist Convention kicked off a partnership with the Pittmans in São Paulo, teams from Highland Church have traveled regularly to the city to participate in a variety pack of ministry.

They arrange basketball camps, children's clubs, and women's events all through a partnership with a specific local church. It's a relationship forged for the sake of offering encouragement and support to the believers there.

"God's leading the way, and we are really growing in missions. You've got missionaries doing what they can and the church doing what we can. I think our partnership has created something tangible. It puts a face on missions."

Chris Platt
pastor of Highland Church, Shelbyville, Ky.

"We've been able to model for them how to go door to door, how to share the Gospel and show the love of Christ to the community, and they seem to be embracing what we're doing," Chris said.

When the Highland Church team is back in Kentucky, they keep up with that church throughout the year.

"It gives our people a church to call their own," he said. "It has made it real for people. They've known about missions in the past, but now they know faces and names. They know they need to pray for Pastor Fabio."

Highland Church is "no superstar missions church," Chris points out, but the annual trips have bolstered the work in Brazil and made the church see that it is "one piece of the puzzle."

"God's leading the way, and we are really growing in mis-

sions," he said. "You've got missionaries doing what they can and the church doing what we can. I think our partnership has created something tangible. It puts a face on missions."

Scott said it makes a big difference. "Hundreds if not thousands of churches need to be planted in order to reach the people of our city," he declared. Their partnership with Highland Church "builds long lasting relationships, gives support to our work and the work of the churches and makes it possible to multiply ourselves," Scott said.

Pray for:

■ Missionaries like Scott and Joyce Pittman to be effective in strategizing ways to reach big cities with the Gospel.

■ Church partners to rise up and be a piece of the missions puzzle through praying, giving, and going.

December is the emphasis month for the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions. This year's goal is \$160 million. The offering, in tandem with Cooperative Program gifts from Southern Baptist churches, supports international workers in seeking to fulfill the Great Commission. Gifts to the Lottie Moon offering are received through local Southern Baptist churches or online at IMB.org/lmco, where there are resources to promote the offering.

Students return from mission trips with changed perspective

EAST ASIA (BP) — Keith Wieser said when he looks across his church and identifies the highest-impact individuals — the ones who are highly evangelistic disciplinarians — they have some unifying factors. One of those factors is that they've spent time in East Asia.

"They come back, and their perspective on their life and on the world is completely changed," remarked Keith, who serves as lead pastor of Resonate Church in Pullman, Wa., a church which also has campuses in Idaho and Oregon.

"They see lostness where they had just seen regularity, and they see themselves as missionaries more than when they left," he noted.

Over the past three years more than 80 students have participated in Resonate's partnership with workers in East Asia directed by Southern Baptists' International Mission Board (IMB) in Richmond, Va. They travel there to serve for 10 weeks in the summer or two weeks on Christmas break.

"We put them into a college campus and by being in that context, their lives are radically changed," Keith said. "To be able to say 'I'm here for a specific reason for a short time' develops that courage muscle. As they try stuff there, the receptivity of college students begins to create an optimism that gets carried home with them."

"It builds a courageous spirit, and that permeates their identity."

It also makes a lasting impact on the East Asian students they meet while they're there. "We've seen 13 college students decide to make a decision for Christ," Keith said. "There are four house church-

es that have been started in the past year or so."

All this started in 2014 when Keith and his wife Paige went on a trip to East Asia and saw the incredible opportunities there to reach the region through its university students. When Keith and Paige came back and told their stories, eight Resonate members decided they wanted to relocate their lives to East Asia.

Keith wanted to make a habit of sending students there to get their feet wet in missions. It was a double blessing as it bolstered students' hearts to come back and think missionally at home, while supporting the work of their partners on the field.

"One of the things I most wanted to do with this was have every student see they are empowered to start something for the kingdom," Keith explained. "Going to East Asia not only opens their eyes to the lostness, it shows them that they can do something about it."

It's created a pathway of direct development for missionaries, Keith said. "If you want to accelerate your disciple making, put them in a context overseas. People start to see their world as a place where they were sent as a missionary."

Pray for:

■ IMB workers and their field partners in East Asia to impact lostness by reaching and mobilizing Asian university students.

■ God to raise up more workers through strategic partnerships. Also pray God would prompt churches to be generous in supporting missionaries overseas.



SHARING GOSPEL — A member (second from left) of Resonate Church based in Washington State shares a meal with young East Asian students during a recent mission trip to the region. Over the past three years, Resonate has sent more than 80 students to partner with IMB workers and other teams in East Asia. (IMB photo)

Buried in the prophetic words of Zechariah is a question that we would do well to think about at Christmas time: "For who has despised the day of small things (Zech. 4:10)?" Some translate that to say, "Who despises or just dismisses small beginnings?" It's certainly an interesting question that has great application to the miraculous, awesome celebration of Christmas. Some people miss so much of life because they overlook the day of small things or small beginnings. The Christmas story is, at its essence, an event of small beginnings.

At this Christmas time — while it's such a big event in our culture and certainly worthy of the whole world stopping to give attention to it — pause for a few moments to think about the small beginnings of Christmas. I titled this article "Christmas — Simple as ABC" because the alphabet, usually referred to as the "ABC's", is so foundational and yet so small to everything we say or write or express. The Christmas story is that kind of event, profoundly unexplainable and also unbelievably simple.

Think about the Christmas "A" that would stand for Announcement. The announcement that a person would come, a Savior would arrive. All through Scripture the announcement is given in various forms and fashions but is unmistakably true in every instance. Few of those scriptural announcements are as beautiful and profound as Isaiah 9:6. Hundreds of years before Jesus was born, the prophet said, "For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder." We understand, looking through history, that this person was the Son of God — Jesus — who came to us. Unto us a Child is born. The announcement that God was going to come and live among us. An innocent child, a precious baby boy, would become our Savior.

Can you imagine how people would process Isaiah's proclamation 3,000 years ago, that such a small birth taking place to an average man and woman would bring about an earth-shaking moment? Yes, despise not the day of small beginnings, and to us a baby has come.



Christmas — Simple as ABC

Isaiah goes on to say so beautifully how He will be designated. That "His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6). Suddenly, something so small in its beginnings is overwhelming to every one of us. The announcement, so simple, so amazing, is Jesus. The announcement is that there is hope for the world. There is hope for you. There is hope for me. In the midst of despair, darkness, and dilemmas, there is hope. The announcement came to earth that God was sending His Son.

The Christmas "B" stands for the Birth. The announcement had been made and in time, the promise would be fulfilled. It was an amazing, incredible birth. It was Isaiah who also had the word from God that a virgin would be with child. Baby Jesus would not be born of Joseph or even of the line of Adam, whose sin has touched every one of us down through the ages. His father would be God Himself. Possibly the best known verse in all the Bible states it so clearly this way, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). God's unique Son, His one-of-a-kind Son, His only begotten Son, was born to us at Christmas. So small you would not even recognize, but this life of God would be wrapped in human flesh and

born in Bethlehem two thousand years ago. Indeed, small beginnings that have touched the entire planet.

The Christmas "C" could represent Circumstances. The circumstances around which the birth of Jesus came are in themselves breathtaking and remind us that God is in control. God was shaping everything. The most powerful leader on the planet, Roman Emperor Caesar Augustus, had no idea God was using him. Augustus would make the decision that a census was in order and everyone should return to their hometown to register. I feel confident that this Caesar made decisions he thought were a lot more important than ordering a census so that the government would know where people were and how much taxes he could expect. However, he signed the census proclamation. Luke writes in the second chapter of his Gospel, "And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered" (Luke 2:1). It was just a small decision with a big impact, and that was to bring about the biggest hope of mankind ever to be revealed. People may have thought, "Well how's this going to affect my income?" It wouldn't affect anyone's income as much as it would affect their eternity. The small circumstances became important for every one of us to evaluate.

Another circumstance that is amazing to analyze has to do with Joseph, who was supposed to marry Mary but finds out she's going to have a baby. According to Scripture, being a good man, he was just going to quietly put her aside and not make a public spectacle of it, not damage her reputation any further. He would just tell her they were not going to go through with the wedding since obviously someone else had been involved with her and a child soon to be born.

Let's just for a moment consider if that scenario had happened, that Joseph was so distraught he broke off the relationship and filed for separation and let her go on her way. Probably this young woman who had never been out of the region of Nazareth, would have found family members to care of her and she would have borne the child right there in her comfortable hometown area. However, the prophet Micah declared that the birthplace of the child was to be Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). The prophetic words from hundreds of years before would have been untrue if Joseph had divorced Mary, but that's not what happened. In a dream Joseph had, the angel told him he did have to fear to take Mary to be his wife for God had touched her and the child she would soon bear would be God's child (Matthew 1:20-21). The good man Joseph became Joseph the believing man. He embraced what God was doing by embracing his wife to help her and to love her.

Don't overlook small things. Don't ignore the little things of which God wants you to be a part. Those small things may, in the days of your life to come, grow into big things, enormous things. May this Christmas be that kind of Christmas for you that even the small things that are taking place around you, you will quickly see and through eyes of faith and understanding that God is at work. You will see how big, how enormous the Lord's hand can make things become. Merry Christmas to all and to each of you a glorious experience with the baby Jesus who will be our eternal, reigning King.

The author can be contacted at directions@mbcb.org.

Revivals & Homecomings

► Liberty Church, Noxapater: Revival, Jan. 6 — 9; Sun., 11 a.m., followed by lunch and 6 p.m.; Mon. — Wed., 7 p.m.; Kenny Evans, speaker; Charles Rook, pastor.

MS POSITIONS

CENTER GROVE BAPTIST CHURCH, MABEN, MS, IS LOOKING FOR A PART-TIME DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S MINISTRY. If interested, please email centergrovebaptist@gmail.com or call Rev. Thad Moore, Pastor, at 662-809-0914.

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FRANKLIN BAPTIST CHURCH IN FLORA IS IN NEED OF A MINISTER OF MUSIC. Please send resume to FBC 2222 Cox Ferry Rd. Flora, MS 39071.

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IMMANUEL BAPTIST OF VICKSBURG IS SEEKING A FULL-TIME ASSOCIATE PASTOR/YOUTH MINISTER. Please email resumes to mbull12@yahoo.com or mail to IBC Personnel Committee at 6949 Hwy 81 South, Vicksburg, MS 39180.

EASTWOOD BAPTIST CHURCH OF INDIANOLA IS RECEIVING RESUMES FOR A PART-TIME MINISTER OF MUSIC. Resumes may be emailed to Lynda Steed at steed_m@bellsouth.net or mailed to Eastwood Baptist Church, P. O. Box 466 Indianola, MS 38751 ATTN: Music Search Committee.

PARKWAY BAPTIST CHURCH, HOUSTON, MS, IS SEEKING A FULL TIME OR PART TIME WORSHIP LEADER. Please email resume to the search committee at randyrinehart63@gmail.com.

CALVARY BAPTIST CHURCH OF MERIDIAN, MS IS SEEKING A BI-VOCATIONAL MINISTER OF MUSIC. Our Worship Services are a Blend of contemporary and traditional music. Interested parties should send a resume to cbcnfo1@comcast.net For More Information Call: Sharon Seal @ 601-483-5432.

SEEKING A FULL-TIME PASTOR — BETHANY BAPTIST CHURCH. Located at Meridian, MS in the Wynot community of Southern Lauderdale County. Please email resume to office@whynotbethany.org or mail to Bethany Baptist Church, 4475 Ponds Road, Meridian, MS 39301.

NEW PROSPECT BAPTIST CHURCH, OLIVE BRANCH, MS IS SEEKING A BI-VOCATIONAL MUSIC DIRECTOR. Please email resume to rcurtis@newprospect.net.

CLASSIFIEDS

THREE BOOKS AVAILABLE FROM NATIVE MISSISSIPPIAN, FORMER PASTOR, AND LIFEWAY EDITOR, ELI LANDRUM — Waiting for a Song in the Night (Trauma of Pastor Termination), The Compassionate Father (Parable), and Commitment or Compromise (Discipleship). Available for \$15 plus postage at ebj@bellsouth.net.

HOLY LAND TOUR: MARCH 7 - 16, 2019 WITH EMMANUEL BAPTIST CHURCH, GRENADA, MS. Led by Dr. Wayne VanHorn through DeHoney Travel Services. Contact (662) 226-5316 for more information.

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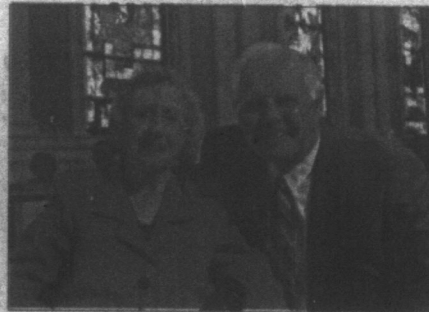
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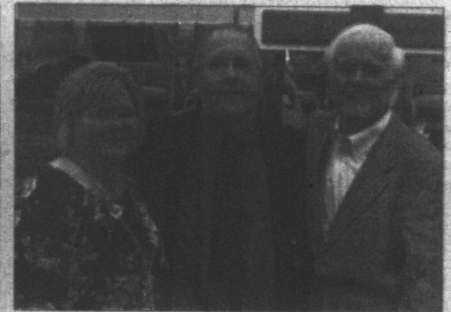
Just for the Record



GILLSBURG CHURCH, GILLSBURG'S, Women on Mission group honored the Amite County Sheriff's Department Nov. 30.



FIRST CHURCH, BATESVILLE, recognized Jimmie Thompson for teaching for 62 years on Nov. 25. She is shown with pastor Tommy Snyder.



BEULAH CHURCH, DECATUR, held a licensing service for Tod Harrison Dec. 2. Shown are LaDonna Harrison, Harrison, and pastor Gary Rivers.



NEW HOPE CHURCH, FOXWORTH, ordained Rich Stampley to the deacon ministry Nov. 25. Pastor Tim Parker, left, is shown presenting Stampley's certificate as his wife Misti and sons Ike and Conner stand with him.



MT. OLIVE CHURCH, SMITHDALE, honored Charles Lee Townsend (left) and James Pearlje Bowlin (right) for their service to the church as deacons for 35 and 62 years respectively. They are shown with pastor Eric Moak.



NEW LIBERTY CHURCH, MORTON, held a baby/child dedication on Sunday December 2. Shown are the participants: Megan, Paitlynn, John and Cruz Springer, Jason, Jase, Renee and Rylie McCaughn and Beau, Anna, Lena Elizabeth Rhinewalt.



GOODEN LAKE CHURCH, BELZONI, held deacon ordination services Nov. 11 for two new deacons, Tim Abney and Ken Hood. Shown, first photo, are Lillie Mae Hood, Hood, Bobby Jo Hood, Jennifer Smith, and Layne Smith; second photo, Billy Abney, Annie Abney, Abney, Sandra Abney, Layne Marie Eaton, and Brittany Eaton.



BIBL i O C i P H E R

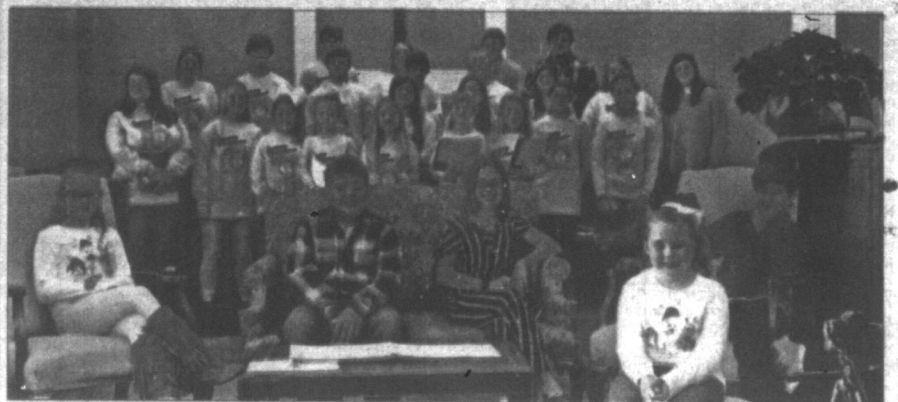
WXM LZYPY HWOY W UKSHY NPKO
ZYWUYX, JWBSXT, LZKC WPL OB
QYRKUYM JKX SX AZKO S WO AYRR
ERYWJYM.

OWPV KXY: YRYUYX

Clue: L = T

Have fun with cryptography and exercise your Bible knowledge. A King James Version Bible verse has been encoded by letter substitution. The same letter is substituted throughout the puzzle. Solve by trial and error. Answer to last week's puzzle: Colossians 4:1

By Charles Marx, 1932-2004, © 2005



ARLINGTON CHURCH, BOGUE CHITTO, recently performed A Snappy Christmas, written by Mary Warren. Shown are the participants. Stephen Slump, pastor.

Promise Kept • Luke 1:26-38

In recent lessons, we have noticed God's faithfulness in keeping His promises even when His people acted in ignoble ways. In today's lesson, God's faithfulness in sending the Messiah, the promised king, was realized in His dealings with a Galilean virgin, whom the Christian world has come to know and love as Mary.

The Greeting (1:26-29)

The action started "in the sixth month" (Lk. 1:26,36). The time reference ties together God's miraculous activity in the lives of the elder Elizabeth and the younger Mary. God enable both the dead womb and the virgin womb to bring forth a man-child, the forerunner and the Messiah. Thus, Christmas begins with the story of two miraculous births.

Gabriel is one of only two angels explicitly named in the Bible, the other is Michael. Gabriel had brought the good news to Elizabeth that her barrenness and its attendant stigma would soon be over. (Lk. 1:19). Gabriel was also used by God to help Daniel understand prophetic visions (Dan. 8:16; 9:21).

Nazareth was a small, insignificant village. Mary was an unknown maiden. Yet, both Nazareth and Mary became household names worldwide because God chose that place and that woman to fulfill His promise of a Messiah.

God takes the initiative in providing the way of salvation. He did it through the original Christmas story and He does it today.

If we listen to the promptings of the Holy Spirit and seek fellowship with the Lord, we will find Him.

The Promise (1:30-33)

Mary needed not fear the good news Gabriel shared with her, news of God's favor and faithfulness. We learn for the first time in Luke's Gospel, Messiah's name will be Jesus, derived from the Hebrew word meaning "Salvation." Gabriel affirmed five things about Jesus: He will be great, will be called the Son of the Most High, will sit on the throne of His father David, will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and will have no end to His kingdom.

Through these five affirmations, we have certainty that God fulfills His promises completely. God has not changed. The God of the first Christmas is the same God of this Christmas. He is both faithful to do what He promises and shows favor to those who seek Him.

The Explanation (1:34-37)

Mary believed the good news but did

not understand how it could happen. She was a righteous virgin "saving herself for marriage." Gabriel explained how the Holy Spirit would enable her to conceive the child though she had never been with a man. This miraculous conception would bring forth a child known as the "Son of God."

Gabriel also shared with Mary how God had enabled her older cousin Elizabeth, plagued with the stigma of barrenness. Thus the Messiah would come from a virgin womb and His forerunner would come from a dead womb. The entire Christmas story cannot be understood apart from faith in the supernatural workings of God.

Gabriel's final words to Mary on this occasion were, "For Nothing is impossible with God." The word "impossible" derives from the Greek verb *adunatos*, literally meaning "to be without power" or "to be powerless."

The operative phrase in Luke 1:37 is "with God." Power resides with God. Luke declared, "The things impossible (*adunatos*) with man are possible (*dunatos*)

with God" (Lk. 18:27). The verb in Luke 1:37 and the associated adjectives in Luke 18:27 proclaim God's power to save sinners. This message of salvation and faithfulness is the essence of Christmas.

Therefore, all believers can have confidence Jesus is the Son of God who saves those who follow Him. If God's power can make a barren womb and a virgin womb conceive children, then His power can bring new life and fresh purpose to lost sinners. God kept His promise in sending the Messiah; He keeps His promise to save all who call upon the Messiah's name, Jesus.

The Commitment (1:38)

The encounter between Mary and Gabriel concluded with a firm commitment on the virgin's part. Mary committed to two things. First, she identified herself as the servant (ESV) or bondservant (NASB) of the Lord, a person whose sole purpose was to serve her master. Second, she expressed her willingness for the Lord to do to her according to Gabriel's word. She submitted to God's plan.

This Christmas, believers can respond to God's truth with obedience and humility too. As God's servants today, we honor Him by obeying His word to us.

VanHorn is Dean of the Mississippi College School of Christian Studies and the Arts.



Explore the Bible

with W. Wayne VanHorn

The Angels' Announcement • Luke 2:1-14

Over the years, how many times have you read or heard the Christmas story? Your answer could possibly be, "to numerous to count or remember." Has the Christmas story become so familiar to you that you think there is nothing new for you to learn? Recently, I received a copy of a new devotional book by Nancy DeMoss Wolgemuth entitled, "The First Songs of Christmas." If you have never studied the songs of Elizabeth, Mary, Zechariah, the Angels, and Simeon, this could be your opportunity to learn something new. As we read the account of the birth of Jesus and the announcement to the shepherds, we should never lose sight of what God accomplished through this miraculous event and the reason Jesus came.

As we open the second chapter of Luke, we know from Matthew 1:24, Joseph had taken Mary as his wife. Now, according to God's calendar, it is time to set into motion His travel arrangements for them. Nazareth was home for the newlyweds, and there would be the support of family. Prophecy stated some 600 years earlier, "But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days" (Micah 5:2 ESV). A decree was issued

by Caesar Augustus that "all the world" should be registered. Quirinius was governor of Syria, and everyone was to "go to his own town" (Luke 2:1-5 ESV). Joseph's lineage, being from the house of David, meant he had to go to Bethlehem; thus fulfilling prophecy.

Initially, Bethlehem was called Ephrath or Ephrathah which means "fruitful." Bethlehem was known as the "house of bread." The first mention of this historical town is found in Genesis 35:16. This is where Rachel died giving birth to her son, Benjamin (Jacob called him Benjamin), which means "Son of my sorrow." Years later Isaiah wrote, "He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief" (Isa. 53:3 ESV). After the birth of Jesus, Matthew (2:16-18) wrote the town experienced great sorrow when King Herod had children under the age of two slain. He references Jeremiah 31, writing about Rachel weeping for her children. In the book of Ruth, Naomi

and Ruth return to this town where Boaz becomes their kinsman-redeemer. He and Ruth are part of the lineage from which David was born (Matt. 1:1-6). David became the God selected king for the nation of Israel (1 Sam. 17:12). Pastor David Jeremiah states it was a city of symbolism, sorrow, salvation, and selection.

Travel arrangements included walking a distance of almost 80 miles to Bethlehem. There was no five-star hotel available, no

room for them in the inn. Instead, they were told about a manger. It was there that "Mary gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him

in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger" (Luke 2:7 ESV). The Savior came not as the world expected, but meek and lowly - fulfilling and perfecting His Father's prophecy and plan.

There is something about announcing the birth of the first-born child. In today's world it would be published on Facebook, pictures with text messages, phone calls,

and sometimes an actual birth announcement would be mailed. This was not the case with the birth of Jesus. Mary and Joseph couldn't even share the good news with their families. Instead, the announcement of the Savior's birth was first made to the shepherds who were "keeping watch over their flock by night" (v. 8). And an angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people" (v. 10). The angel may have been Gabriel, the name is not given, perhaps not to draw attention to the messenger but the message. The angel then gave the location as to where "a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (v. 11) could be found. "And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased'" (vv. 13, 14).

Announcement! Announcement! Announcement! "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14 ESV). Is He your Savior and Lord; repent, believe and trust Him. He is everything you need!

Leathers is a member of First Church, Madison.

Bible Studies for Life

with Laura Leathers



RELIEF

cont. from p. 1

funds," Porter said. "It's an incredible thing that we don't accept government funds but are supported by our own Southern Baptist churches."

Southern Baptist Disaster Relief, in which the Mississippi Baptist Disaster Relief Task Force plays a leading role, is among the three largest providers of disaster relief assistance in the United States. Southern Baptist churches, associations, and state con-

ventions all partner to mobilize volunteers, resources, and equipment to provide services. NAMB provides national coordination and assistance in larger, multi-state responses.

To learn more about disaster relief efforts, contact the MBCB Men's Ministry Department

at P.O. Box 530, Jackson, MS 39205-0530. Telephone: (601) 292-3335 or toll-free outside Jackson (800) 748-1651, ext. 335. E-mail: smcgivney@mbcb.org. Web site: mbcb.org.

Tax-deductible financial gifts to meet disaster relief needs can be sent to MBCB at P.O. Box

530, Jackson, MS 39205-0530, McGivney said. Checks should be made payable to the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board and designated to Disaster Relief on the memo line.

Editor's note: Baptist Press contributed to this article.

Home! • Genesis 31:2-16

Last week's lesson focused on God fulfilling His promise to provide a Messiah. That lesson ties into today's theme, "God directs." The title "Home!" speaks for itself. This lesson is being taught in churches even as many family members have traveled home for the holidays. The journey home conjures up images of family, friends, and familiar horizons. Yet Jacob had deceived Isaac and incurred Esau's wrath. Would home be an inviting place for him after 20 years of being away (Gen. 31:38,41)?

Obedience Required (31:2-3)

God prospered Jacob so his in-laws became angry and suspicious of him. God used the disharmony between Jacob and his in-laws to direct him homeward. Genesis 31:3 is our memory verse for this week because it tells of God's command to Jacob to return to the land of his fathers and relatives. The most important part of the verse is the Lord's assurance to Jacob as He said, "I will be with you." God used similar language in promising His presence as Jacob dreamed at Bethel on his departure 20 years earlier (Gen. 28:15). Jacob had incorporated the language into his vow, saying, "If God will be with me and will keep me on this journey..." (Gen. 28:20). Old Testament scholars refer to this phenomenon as the "Theology of the Presence."

The Lord is present with His people today as well. Believers can be thankful for God's promises when facing jealousy and hostility. He guides us in terms of the path we are to take in our daily lives, promising to be with us as we journey.

Obedience Declared (31:4-13)

Once Jacob realized God was directing him to return to his homeland, he summoned his wives, Rachel and Leah (note the favored wife, though younger,

is named first) to the field where he was watching his flock. He recounted to them the growing hostility of their father, Laban, toward him. Yet, in the midst of growing hostility, Jacob affirmed God's presence by stating, "the God of my father has been with me" (Gen. 31:5). Here, the singular "father" referred to Isaac, indicating a maturing faith on Jacob's part. Jacob had grown to understand the God who took care of Isaac, was now taking care of him as well.

Jacob also recounted to his wives his full service to Laban; he had served

with all his strength, holding nothing back. In spite of his dedicated service, Laban continued to cheat Jacob, even as he had done on Jacob's first wedding night. The word "cheated" (Gen. 31:7a; NASB) derives from a Hebrew verb meaning "to mock" or "to deceive." Yet, in the midst of those 20 years of being treated deceitfully, Jacob acknowledged that "God did not allow him to hurt me" (Gen. 31:7b; NASB).

In Jacob's eyes, God's faithfulness had resulted in Jacob being enriched in livestock in spite of Laban's machinations. God had directed Jacob all along even through

dreams (Gen. 31:10-11). God assured Jacob in a dream that He had seen all that Laban had been doing to him. The Lord referred to Himself (as the God of Bethel), the anointed pillar, and Jacob's vow. Then He instructed Jacob to leave Laban's land and return to the land of his birth (Gen. 31:12b-13).

God cares for His people as much today as He did for Jacob and his family centuries ago. Believers can honor God

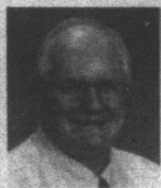
and His directions, knowing that He has their best interests in mind. When we declare our obedience to the Lord's directions, we can rest assured in His faithful provisions along the way.

Obedience Affirmed (31:14-16)

In a show of familial solidarity, Rachel and Leah affirmed Jacob's understanding of the situation, distancing themselves from their father (Gen. 31:14-15). Additionally, they acknowledged God's handiwork in enriching Jacob for their benefit and for their children. Then they encouraged him to "do whatever God has said" (Gen. 31:16b). Thus, the return to Jacob's homeland was directed by God, understood and recounted by Jacob, and humbly accepted by his wives. Jacob had entered Laban's land as a loner; he left with two wives, six sons and a daughter by Leah (Gen. 29:31-35; 30:17-21), two sons by Rachel's handmaid Bilhah (Gen. 30:1-8), two sons by Leah's handmaid Zilpah (Gen. 30:9-13), and one son by Rachel (Gen. 30:22-24).

God's presence ensures His blessings to those who trust Him. Believers can take steps of faith based upon God's past faithfulness. His past performance is a guarantee of future results.

VanHorn is Dean of the Mississippi College School of Christian Studies and the Arts.

**Explore the Bible**

with W. Wayne VanHorn

Simeon's Proclamation • Luke 2:25-35

"A Christmas Carol," a novella by Charles Dickens, was first published in 1843. I was an adolescent when my parents took me to see the theater adaption. I looked forward to attending the performance with great anticipation and excitement. When the day finally arrived, I was mesmerized as I watched the performance. To this very day, I wonder how this elaborate production was completed. Tremendous planning and work went into the scenery, sound effects, costumes, makeup, memorization of lines and countless rehearsals. Perhaps the most remembered quote from the book is the following: "And it was always said of him, that he knew how to keep Christmas well, if any man alive possessed the knowledge. May that be truly said of us, and all of us! And so, as Tiny Tim observed, God bless Us, Every One!"

However, in "The Christmas Story," written and produced by God, there were no dress rehearsals or memorization of lines. It was real life, unfolding according to God's timetable. Now it is time to move to a different staging area, and we will learn about a man who blessed God. Before we move, we need to be aware of some things which have transpired before our focal passage. First, according to the ceremonial laws, a child was to be circumcised on the eighth day and then officially named (Luke

2:21). The angel told Joseph and Mary, separately, they were to name the child, Jesus. In Hebrew form this name was Jeshua, meaning "the Lord" and "to save." When the phrases are joined, you have "The Lord is salvation."

Next was the rite of purification. If a woman had a son, she was unclean for seven days and then had to wait an additional 33 days before entering the temple (Luke 2:22; Ex. 13:2, 12-15). Mary followed this ceremonial law because we are told, "Now when the days of her purification according to the Law of Moses were completed, they brought Him (Jesus) to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord" (v. 22). In the next verse Luke reminds the readers according to the law, "the firstborn male that opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord" (v. 23); this is all connected to the Passover. Then at precisely the right moment and by divine appointment, Simeon will arrive on stage.

We know nothing about this Simeon's family, his tribe, his age, his occupation, nor is he mentioned again. Scripture does not state he was a priest. However, it does reveal he was righteous before God and devoted before men. "He was looking for the consolation (comfort) of Israel; and the Holy Spirit was upon him" (vs. 25b NASB).

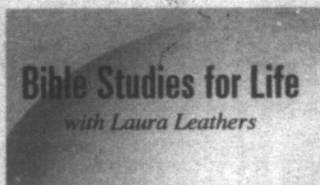
He had been told, "by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ" (v. 26). With this news, he probably visited the temple often or even daily, anticipating and hoping that this would be the day. The day finally arrived, Simeon "came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus... (v. 27). Perhaps he overheard the mention of the child's name, or in the Spirit, he just knew this was the Lord's Christ.

Then Simeon took Jesus into his arms and bursts forth with words of blessing and prophecy (Luke 2:29-32). The following is a synopsis of what those verses

mean: "1) Jesus would be the salvation of the world, 2) He would deliver truth not only to those in Israel but also to the Gentiles, 3) Jesus would bring glory upon the people of Israel" (www.gotquestions.org/simeon-in-the-bible.html). Mary and Joseph marveled at what was being said about Jesus (Luke 2:33). Then in verses 34 and 35, we learn Simeon directs his comments directly to Mary prophesying the following (the same website): "1) some of the Jewish people would believe that Jesus is the 'consolation of Israel,' and some would not, 2) there would be much opposition to Jesus in the future, 3) Jesus would reveal truth, 4) Jesus' suffering would cause Mary much pain, personally. Years later when Mary was at the Calvary's cross (John 19:26-27), she probably realized she had experienced everything Simeon had told her.

There will be one final setting to God's story, His coming! Acts 1:11 (NASB) states, "... This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you watched Him go into heaven." As a Christ follower are you filled with hope and anticipating His return? Proclaim the Good News!

Leathers is a member of First Church, Madison.

**Bible Studies for Life**

with Laura Leathers

PAKISTAN

cont. from p. 1

expelled, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that were addressing various humanitarian and social justice issues.

The various groups were informed individually of Pakistan's decision, followed by a tweet from Pakistan Minister for Human Rights Shireen Mazari that accused the expelled groups of "non-compliance" and "spreading 'disinfo [sic].'"

"They must leave," she tweeted Dec. 5. "They need to work within their stated intent which these 18 didn't do!"

Mazari claimed the groups' work was not expansive. "It's like a visa — some get it some don't!" she tweeted the following day. "Over 80 INGOs (in-

ternational non-governmental organizations) re-registered! Btw some denied registration had no projects on the ground beyond seminars, discussions & free trips abroad... Only seminar lot may miss them!"

Many NGOs were not given specific reasons for their oust-

ers, according to news reports. A total of 27 NGOs were expelled in December 2017, but World Vision was among 18 who appealed the decisions, AP said.

Pakistan changed registration procedures for NGOs in 2015.

College News



BLUE MOUNTAIN COLLEGE (BMC) has placed three students on the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) Daktronics-NAIA Scholar-Athletes roster for 2018: cross country runners (from left) Elle Hamilton, a junior from Shannon; Rachel Starnes, a senior from Oxford; and Cyprian Ngetich, a junior from Bomet, Kenya.

Just for the Record



The children's Christmas program at **NEW BETHEL CHURCH, CARROLL COUNTY**, was about the legend of candy canes. Later, there was a congregational potluck and a visit from Santa Claus.



Helen Ward of Columbus has been named site coordinator for **CHRISTIAN WOMEN'S JOB CORPS-GOLDEN TRIANGLE** in Columbus, a volunteer-led ministry of the Miss. Woman's Missionary Union and Women's Ministries under the auspices of Golden Triangle Association in Columbus. She is a member of First Church, Starkville.

Submission Guidelines

The Baptist Record is pleased to publish news and photographs of special events that take place in cooperating churches of the Mississippi Baptist Convention. News items and/or photographs depicting benefits and activities for secular or outside organizations will not be published.

Preferred method: news may be submitted electronically to the e-mail address below, and must be included in the message segment of an e-mail form. Secondary method: news may be typewritten or neatly printed on 8 1/2 by 11-inch paper and mailed. All articles must be received in writing; no articles will be accepted over the telephone. Due to ever-present virus threats, no text attachments will be accepted. Photograph attachments in JPEG format are permissible.

Please make articles concise. Include the who, what, when, where details of the story, along with a contact person's address and telephone number.

Photographs must be submitted electronically

via e-mail, as attachments in JPEG format. **Hard copy photographs mailed through the postal service will not be accepted.** Photographs must be clear, sharp, and well-lighted. Photographs must depict people. No landscape, building, or object-only photographs will be printed. Photographs containing inappropriate gestures and objectionable clothing will not be published. Cell phone photographs and other low resolution items that do not reproduce well on newsprint are generally not publishable.

There is no guarantee that news items and/or photographs will be published, and unsolicited material will not be acknowledged or returned. All news items are subject to editing, and all photographs are subject to cropping. News items and/or photographs can be published one time only. Deadline for submitting news is one week prior to requested publication date. Articles that are not date-sensitive will be published on a space-available basis. These guidelines are not meant to be exhaustive.

Submit news to The Baptist Record, P.O. Box 530, Jackson, MS 39205-0530. FAX: (601) 292-3330. E-mail: baptistrecord@mbcb.org.

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Need a light?

Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life." (John 8:12)

Simply share the following prayer with God in your own words:

1. Lord, I admit that I need you. (I have sinned.)
2. I want forgiveness for my sins and freedom from eternal death. (I repent.)
3. I believe Jesus died and rose from the grave to forgive my sins and to restore my relationship with you. (I believe in Jesus.)
4. By faith, I invite Jesus Christ into my life. From this time on, I want to live in a loving relationship with Him. (I receive Christ as my Savior and Lord.)

"But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in his name." (John 1:12)
If you make a decision for Christ today, contact a local Southern Baptist church for spiritual guidance.